

BACKGROUND FOR ELK MANAGEMENT - BRUCELLOSIS PROPOSALS

In January 2013 the FWP Commission endorsed recommendations from a statewide citizen work group for Elk Management Guidelines in Areas with Brucellosis. The fundamental intent of these guidelines is to manage transmission risk between elk and livestock by reducing commingling with adjusted elk distribution at small scales. Independently or with the MT Department of Livestock, many livestock operations have already developed risk management plans that include livestock distribution elements.

Specific elk management tools currently available for use in the Designated Surveillance Area (DSA) include hazing, stackyard fencing, and small scale lethal removals by hunters after February 15 (Elk Management Removals or "EMRs"). Recommendations from the statewide citizen working group also recognized the utility of local working groups/discussions to better incorporate local expertise and experience.

In addition to relatively general guidelines, the Commission endorsed a more detailed 2013 annual work plan and scheduled a summary public review for late summer/early fall. Several management actions were implemented in 2013 but only limited progress was made relative to local work group discussions.

In the summer/fall 2013 review process the Commission adopted a general work plan for 2014 and re-emphasized local discussions. One change between the 2013 and 2014 work plans was the shortening of the time period in spring when lethal removal would be allowed. The general 2014 work plan was adopted such that any subsequent modifications proposed by local work groups could be brought back to the Commission for public review and potential approval via the Commission's public process.

In response to these Commission actions, the Wildlife sub-committee of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed agreed to host a local discussion for the Paradise Valley. FWP staff members were directly involved and Park County MSU Extension staff were instrumental in facilitation and other meeting logistics. Additionally, the local sporting group (Park County Rod and Gun Club) was represented in first stage conference calling and in developing meeting agendas. To date, three meetings have been held in Livingston with "full room" attendance that includes landowners and sporting/conservation interests.

At the most recent local meeting in Livingston on January 28, the following two recommendations were "group edited" to pursue consensus for presentation to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for approval and addition to the existing 2014 annual work plan. These two recommendations did not receive full consensus among the attendees when asked if they supported this language going to the Commission for review and potential approval. Landowners and some of the sporting/conservation attendees representing a strong majority in the room were generally supportive of additional Commission and public review. There was a small minority opposition from some other attendees representing the sporting/conservation perspective while a third small minority remained neutral. The vote on whether or not to present the first recommendation to the Commission was 24 "for", 2 "against", and 3 "neutral". The vote on whether or not to present the second recommendation to the Commission was 22 "for", 2 "against", and 3 "neutral". FWP staff did not vote.

The following two recommendations will be proposed to the Fish and Wildlife Commission on February 13, 2014. Opportunity for public comment will be available at that time. Should the

Commission adopt these recommendations or adjusted versions of them, a public comment period would be initiated with any final Commission decision to be made at the April 10 meeting. The following italicized text is the literal language from the January 28 Livingston meeting. In the first recommendation, the May 1 and May 15 dates represent proposed expanded final dates to initiate and end lethal removal efforts in the spring, respectively. The currently approved dates for 2014 are April 15 and April 30. In the 2013 work plan no such specific dates were identified and lethal elk removals could take place until “.....elk calves or elk calving behavior are observed.” The second recommendation looks to clarify definition and to receive authorization for fencing efforts beyond the relatively small scale stackyard fencing implemented to date.

The Elk Management in Areas with Brucellosis Local Working Group for the Paradise Valley has recommendations for revisions to be included in their work plan for 2014. These recommendations go above and beyond the Elk Management in Areas with Brucellosis 2014 Work Plan presented by FWP.

Recommendation 1—Reinstate the May 1-May15 dates to the local work plan. The May1-15 window is a critical time period for prevention of commingling and disease transmission in Paradise Valley. Some form of lethal removal may be necessary to prevent commingling/disease transmission during this time period. Livestock producers who desire to prevent elk from commingling with cattle on private property and DNRC lands must have tools available. When hazing becomes ineffective, forms of lethal removal should include both the EMRs and kill permits.

Recommendation 2---These recommendations are meant to be applied on private property as described in a plan developed by the property owner(s) and/or their designee(s) in conjunction with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

- A. Use large-scale fencing in suitable areas for creation of corridors to allow elk movement, but prevent comingling and disease transmission in pastures used by cattle during the risk period, and*
- B. The unwritten definition of ‘small-scale’ should be increased to include pastures where cattle are present during the risk period, and*
- C. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks should include fence modification (e.g., MSU Extension MontGuide 2014) as a method of fencing appropriate to minimize brucellosis*

transmission in the Paradise Valley DSA and should be responsible for the cost of materials, as in the existing game damage process.